

Indian Hawthorn 'Majestic Beauty' *Rhaphiolepis indica*



India Hawthorn, a member of the rose family, is native to southern China. This attractive small shrub grows well in all areas of the State of Florida, is tolerant to low-temperatures and relatively pest-free. It has nice dark green-colored leaves and produces abundant apple-like flowers in the spring. Small, round, dark blue fruits follow the blooms, adding to the beauty of this plant in the landscape. This attractive flowering shrub requires very little care and has many uses in the landscape.

The plant: India Hawthorn is an evergreen shrub, with a slow rate of growth, reaching about 5 feet tall and 5 feet wide. The leaves are simple, up to 3 inches long, alternate, leathery, finely serrated, and clustered at the tip of the branches. Dark green in color above and light green and often brown pubescent on the veins on the under side. Flowers are pinkish to white, fragrant, about 0.5 inch in diameter, with 5 narrow pointed petals that grow in 3 to 4 inches long, loose terminal panicles in the spring. The fruits are small, round, about 0.5 inch, purple to black in color.

Culture: Plants will grow and bloom best in full sun, but will do well in partial shade. It prefers fertile, slightly acid, well-drained soils but, will grow well in most types of soils. It tolerates moderate draught once established. During severe drought periods, watering will be necessary to avoid stressing the plants and making them susceptible to pest problems. When planting, prepare a hole twice as wide and as deep as the root ball, making sure that the plant will remain at the same soil level it had in the container. Fertilize lightly in the spring and fall with a complete fertilizer. It is mainly propagated by cuttings but can also be propagated by seeds and air layering. There are varieties that will grow to different heights in their adult forms, buy varieties according for the use intended and avoid most pruning practices. A yearly pruning will be necessary if a small, compact plant is desired and the variety grows too tall for the desired effect. All pruning should be done immediately after blooming ends, in late spring or early summer. If grown as small hedge, trim lateral branches. For lateral growth, thin out the upright branches. It is an ideal plant to grow in containers for patios and terraces, because it is a prolific bloomer even when small, grows slowly, and requires very little maintenance. Mulching is recommended for this plant.

Varieties: The variety 'Rosea' has deep pinkish flowers, and has a compact type of growth; 'Compact' is a dwarf variety; 'Alba' has white flowers. Other varieties planted in Florida include 'Elizabeth', 'Clara', 'Peggy', 'Rose Janice', 'Majestic Beauty', and 'Spring Rapture'.

Use: It is mostly used as a foundation shrub or informal hedge, in containers, and in planters. It is also planted in middle of the roads as a ground cover.

Pests and diseases: Scales, leaf spots, fire blight, and nematode problems affect this plant. Leaf spot problems are more severe by excessive watering with over-head sprinkler irrigation. Entomosporium leaf spot is one of the most common fungal diseases of this plant. Morning sun is helpful in discouraging leaf spot and other fungal diseases. If fire blight occurs, prune infected branches during dry weather and apply a copper fungicide immediately after pruning. Make sure to discard all infected tissues removed from the plant to avoid new infections. If scales become a serious problem, an oil spray should be used on infested plants to control this pest..

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